

Prepared

Michael Allen

The book of Jonah has always been a favorite of many over the years, not only because it has a really good story, but also because of the many lessons that can be taken from its text. To that end, there is one word that appears four times in this book that seems to have a big impact on the actions of Jonah. It is the word "prepared."

The story tells us that God prepared four things that directly interacted with Jonah. First, in **chapter 1, verse 17**, Scripture tells us that God prepared a great fish that swallowed Jonah. And for three days and three nights, this great fish not only held Jonah captive, but no doubt also kept him safe from the perils of the sea and transported him to a location that was probably a lot closer to Nineveh. Jonah emerged as a changed man but ultimately still had a few issues to resolve.

After arriving in Nineveh and successfully preaching to the people there, he became angry with his success and was in need of another life-course correction from God. As Jonah sat outside the city, God prepared a plant (4:6) that would give him shade, and then God prepared a worm (4:7) to destroy the plant and prepared a strong hot wind (4:8) that would bring home the point to him, that he should care more about the souls within the city, than for a plant that made him comfortable.

But as we take a step back and look at this story, on the whole, there also seems to be something else that God prepared in this story, but it wasn't named specifically. And that was the environment where everything came together to create change within the people of Nineveh. There was a reason that Jonah didn't want to go to this city. It was the capital city of what would essentially be their enemy, the Assyrians. Later writings would talk about the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib as he worked to conquer the region. The entire book of Nahum is devoted solely to the sins of Nineveh and what the judgment against them would be. One can understand Jonah's hesitation in traveling to this city, based on the assumption that they would never repent, and that his life might very well be in danger the minute he started delivering his message. The bottom line was that Jonah didn't want them to repent. And even though Jonah might not have been personally prepared to deliver his message, we know that the people of this city were ready to hear what God had to say. It was the right person at the right location and time that allowed this monumental change to happen. And whether we consider him ready or reluctant, in the end, he was successful.

As we transfer this lesson to us today, we know that we need to always be ready to discuss the Gospel with anyone who will listen. We never know what has transpired beyond our line of sight; we never know what has been prepared without our knowledge. We can't look at evangelism from the viewpoint of only identifying problems, listing why we will surely fail in our efforts. Maybe just beyond all the obstacles that we see, God has prepared a way for us so that we will succeed. Maybe we too can be the right person at the right location and at the right time, to make a monumental difference in the eternal lives of others.